



Malachi

Get Started

As Valentine's Day approaches, sitcoms are going to get quick laughs with plot lines involving husbands getting non-romantic gifts for their wives; or forgetting to get a gift altogether.

Thoughtfulness is probably more important than the gift itself; certainly more important than the material value of the gift. Your beloved wants to know you put some real thought into it, rather than stopping by 7-11 on the way home.

The setting in the Book of Malachi is one of God's people going through the motions without, we would say, any real emotion. There was nothing in their worship to suggest thoughtfulness and, therefore, real love.

When God confronted them with it, they complained and argued with Him.

A book like this gives us opportunity to be certain we are showing genuine thoughtfulness towards Jesus in our walk with Him.

Get Studying

Many Bible experts suggest Malachi wasn't a person's name, but a descriptive title for the prophecy.

Malachi means "my messenger," which was a common title for a prophet. The first translation of the Old Testament - into Greek in about 250BC - used the term as part of a title for the book, calling the prophecy that followed "the word of the Lord to Israel by my messenger."

The book became known as "my messenger" (Malachi) for short.

The writer may have chosen this title to identify himself only as a prophet, without revealing his name. It's possible, however, that Malachi was a person's name. But nothing else is known about him.

The people of Malachi's day probably lived about 100 years after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon.

About 50,000 exiles had returned to Judah from Babylon (538-536BC). The temple had been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel (516BC) and the sacrificial system renewed. Ezra had returned in 458BC.

After being back in the land for only a century, the ritual of the Jews' religious routine led to hard heartedness toward God's great love for them and to widespread departure from His law by both people and priest.

Instead of offering the best animals for sacrifice, as Jewish law requires, the people offered the worst animals in the herd - the sick and crippled.

They stopped giving the required 10 percent tithe to the temple.

They were ignoring God's commands to stay faithful in marriage, tell the truth in court, help the poor, and treat everyone fairly.

The prophecy of Malachi is built around seven complaints the people had toward God. These complaints revealed their doubting, discouraged, sinful heart.

1. In what way have You loved us? (Malachi 1:2).
2. In what way have we despised Your name? (Malachi 1:6).
3. In what way have we defiled You? (Malachi 1:7).
4. In what way have we wearied Him? (Malachi 2:17).
5. In what way shall we return? (Malachi 3:7).
6. In what way have we robbed You? (Malachi 3:8).
7. In what way have we spoken against You? (Malachi 3:13).

Lets follow the complaints.

Mal 1:2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved;

Mal 1:3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness."

Mal 1:4 Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places," Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.

Mal 1:5 Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, 'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

Esau and Jacob were brothers, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekkah. Esau's descendants became a nation, the nation of Edom; Jacob's descendants became a nation, the nation of Israel.

Even though Esau and Jacob were brothers, God's dealings with Jacob's descendants compared to Esau's descendants demonstrated His love.

For one thing, Esau, born first by a few minutes, ought to have had the birthright; but God gave it instead to Jacob.

It meant that Jacob and his descendants would be uniquely blessed in history. In the Book of Romans, Paul lists those blessings when he says of them,

Rom 9:4 ... to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;

Rom 9:5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Israel wasn't just blessed more than Edom. She was blessed more than *any* nation.

The wording, "Jacob have I love, but Esau I have hated," is somewhat troublesome. It's easy to show, in other Scriptures, that "hated" can mean something more like, *loved less or rejected*. *I'm not sure that's helpful.*

First of all, realize God is talking about **nations**, not individuals. He chose Israel, not Edom, to shower His blessings upon.

Remember, too, that Israel was commanded to show and share those blessings with all the other nations of the world. Anyone, in any nation, could be saved and share in those blessings.

Deu 7:6 "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

In Genesis 12:3, God said to Abraham, And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God's choosing of Israel did not exclude anyone from salvation.

Edom, as a nation, rejected God, so God rejected them, and it showed in their subsequent history.

There is no basis here for thinking God chooses some people for salvation but chooses others for damnation. He chose Israel to "bless" all the nations - to bring the knowledge of salvation to the whole world.

Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men -especially those who believe.

The second and third complaints:

Mal 1:6 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name. **Yet you say**, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'

Mal 1:7 "You offer defiled food on My altar, **But say**, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.'

Mal 1:8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

The people were bringing, and the priests were accepting as offerings, things that were contemptible.

Some of the things people donate to God are pathetic. You would never think of giving them to anyone else. A few years ago I asked some of the Calvary pastors to tell me the lamest thing ever donated to their ministry. Here are just a few:

- During a clothing drive for a mission to Mexico, someone donated one shoe.
- "We had someone give us both new and used items from some hotels. Some from 5 star hotels. You know, the little shampoo, conditioner, sanitary napkin kind of stuff. Some of it had been opened."
- A rusted-out camper shell that later turned-out to be stolen.
- Used toothbrushes.
- "When we were doing Operation: Christmas Child one year, a guy brought his box three days late. There was nothing for us to do with it, so we opened it to see if there was something that would spoil and thought we'd keep for next year. But when we opened it, it seriously looked as though he'd dug the stuff out of a dumpster. We found old, dirty, broken stuff, including a used toothbrush, and a half eaten pack of cheese and crackers."

Complaint #4:

Mal 2:17 You have wearied the LORD with your words; "Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?"

The people of God in Malachi's day were depressed and discouraged because it seemed like the wicked prospered and had it better than the godly. They grumbled that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD.

Truth be told, God was being longsuffering with Israel. He had promised to bless them above all nations - but for their obedience, not just for who they were.

This is a harder issue, I think, for us than it was for Israel, because we have no direct promise that we will be physically and materially blessed for obedience. We will be *spiritually* blessed for it - but that is almost impossible to quantify until we stand before The Lord.

His presence, then, in any and every situation must become blessing enough for us.

Complaint #5:

Mal 3:7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'

God was calling them to repentance, but they were claiming not to know what to repent of.

This has become common today as folks who are living in obvious sin act as though we are all sinners so what's there to repent of?

Complaint #6:

Mal 3:8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

Mal 3:9 You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.

Mal 3:10 Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.

The Law of Moses had a detailed system of giving based on the tithe. Deuteronomy 14:22-29 is one passage describing this system. If you failed to pay your tithe, you were assessed a 20% penalty (Leviticus 5:14-16; 22:14; 27:31-32).

Since they were withholding their tithes, they were robbing God.

People always ask, Is the tithe for today? Am I required to give 10% to God? And is it based on gross or net?

The short answer is that we are not obligated to tithe but are rather to give according to certain principles laid out in the New Testament.

You should give to your church. For example, in First Timothy 5:17-18 you read, “The elders [pastors] who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, [wage in context] especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.”

Three of the principles that should govern your giving to your church are that you give regularly, you give sacrificially, and you give hilariously.

Think about the money you give to your church. Is it regular, sacrificial, and with hilarity? If not, get with it!

Complaint #7:

Mal 3:13 "Your words have been harsh against Me," Says the LORD, Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'

Mal 3:14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the LORD of hosts?'

One of the meanings of the word “useless” is *desolate*. In other words, serving God leaves you barren, forsaken, ruined. These are all descriptions of their earthly condition. It’s true that the Jews were not outwardly prospering. They were still in subjection to foreign governments; their rebuilt Temple was nothing to be compared to the previous Temple built by Solomon; their economy was struggling.

They thought they should instead be prospering. They used the word “profit.” It means *plunder, gain*. They had the idea that they should be plundering the earth, gaining in material wealth.

Their argument was based on their having “kept [God’s] ordinance and... walked as mourners.” That’s not entirely true though, is it?

The simple fact is that they were putting the priority on this earth and the riches it had to offer. The coming of their Lord, the promise of eternity, were irrelevant to them.

Despite all this complaining, there was a minority who were focusing on eternity. They are described in precious, tender terms in verses sixteen through eighteen of chapter three.

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

Those who “fear” the Lord are believers. In Malachi’s time, they were a small remnant. They must have felt insignificant. They had the same struggles as the majority, and they had had an additional struggle *with* the majority.

1. Like the majority, they had to struggle with their feelings about the wicked who were prospering.
2. But they also looked upon the majority who were despising God and had to be troubled that God allowed them to go on in their rebellion. They must have felt like Habakkuk who pleaded with God to bring revival.

Just when I think I can handle the fact that the wicked are prospering, it’s Christians that make my life miserable. It is a sore trial.

Still, this remnant met together for fellowship and they exalted the Lord. The Lord reveals Himself as an eavesdropper! He listened intently and heard every word they spoke. He had an angel or angels busy writing down in a Book of Remembrance all of their comments.

Malachi 3:17 “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”

God is saying that He will spare believers from eternal punishment, judging them rather according to their faithful service and rewarding them appropriately.

“Then” is obviously a future time. In Malachi’s time the proud were prospering, while those who feared the Lord were floundering. But all of that was earthly; there was the eternal to consider.

One day everyone will see the wisdom of a life dedicated to serving God.

Get Spiritual

Have you ever given or gotten a really lame, thoughtless gift for or from someone you love?

It can be comical, like it is on TV. But when it involves God, Who has given to you His indescribable gift of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus... It's not funny to respond out of ritual or habit, or to withhold the best things for yourself.

Each complaint is something we can be guilty of. Go back over them.

In the end, let's be the group God is eavesdropping upon. Let's live and give in such a way that there's something to write about in God's Book of Remembrance.